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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on lifelong learning and the cultural identity of Canada's native people. The introduction reviews educational programs instituted by indigenous minority groups in New Zealand and Hawaii. The second section reviews the importance of storytelling and ritual ceremonies in Native education. The third section discusses the tension Native people encounter between the demands of modern western society and traditional culture in managing their schools. The fourth section describes how the teaching of traditional culture and science can be merged. The fifth section acknowledges that loss of traditional culture is unavoidable, but suggests that certain rites-of-passage and other life stage activities such as Vision Quest be maintained to help re-create a broad lifelong learning framework for native people. The sixth section examines the importance of traditional language for the life long learning of native people and offers several suggestions on how to maintain it. The seventh section reviews the role and practice of traditional rites of passage ceremonies such as Vision Quest. Finally, the last section reviews the implications of the foregoing for life long learning among indigenous peoples. The Vision Quest ceremony is appended. (JDI)

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Brian Rice
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In: Lifelong Learning: Policies, Practices, and Programs

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Lifelong Learning and Cultural Identity: Canada's Native People

by Brian Rice and John Steckley

Native people within Canada are faced with many challenges, a host of which relate to learning and culture. When should learning take place, who should be taught, what should be learned, who will do the teaching, and how should traditional learning be mixed with contemporary learning? These issues are among the most critical for the cultural survival and continuing contribution of Canada's Native populations to the larger society including its economic well being. This paper describes two elements in traditional Native culture that have been lost for many Natives, and which need to be used as mechanisms for re-establishing traditional links that will make learning for Canada's Natives a lifelong and culturally infused process. Commitment from all members of Native communities, as well as acceptance, support and respect from the dominant culture, are required in order for Natives to re-establish links to what was in the past and needs to be in the future learning through the lifespan.

INTRODUCTION

Many APEC member economies include in their populations aboriginal or indigenous people who are minorities within the larger populations. These people share common problems and, in many cases, are working towards common solutions. Increasingly, lifelong learning may be viewed as a critical solution.

With the lifelong learning context, strategies used by one group can be profitably adopted by others. The Maori in New Zealand, for one example, have broken important ground in revitalizing their minority language with *Kohanga Reo* or "language nests", in which urban Maori pre-schoolers are instructed using the Maori language through a culturally sensitive and community-based program (Fleras 1989). The success of the *Kohanga Reo* inspired the Hawaiian people to develop their similar *Punana Leo* (Kimura 1987). Both of these programs have served as instructive models for people involved in the teaching and revitalization of Canadian Native languages.

This paper will examine problems that Canadian Native people face while implementing educational policies which incorporate various aspects of their cultural traditions. It will be suggested that in order for lifelong learning to be fully and completely embedded within indigenous cultures, as once was the norm, the abo-

riginal community itself has to embark on a path of traditional lifelong learning. Adults must learn along with the children. Further, it will be argued that this must be done in such a way that allows for self-driven, comprehensive, relatively unstructured and informal, but still dedicated pursuit of learning. Though this may sound somewhat radical and perhaps even unprecedented, the fact is it closely reflects many contemporary notions and characteristics associated with lifelong learning, including those described by Candy and Crebert (1991, p. 7):

> *Lifelong learning is characterised by its unstructured nature, and is based on the philosophy that education should be openly and easily accessible to all at any time of life; it establishes that self-improvement and enrichment are goals that are equally as important as the need to update professional and vocational skills.*

TWO ELEMENTS OF TRADITIONAL NATIVE EDUCATION

Historian J.R. Miller (1966, p. 15) examines the traditional education of Canada's Native people with the succinct but meaningful observation, "Not all societies have schools, but all human communities possess educational systems". Crucial to the arguments to be made in this paper is the significance of two elements of "schoolless", traditional Native education. The first is what Miller terms "a heavy reliance on the use of stories for didactic purposes" (p. 17). Key here is the role of the Elders as story tellers, as lifelong learning facilitators mixing entertainment with object lessons and providing community members of all ages with a solid foundation for their cultural identity. Jake Thomas, a highly-respected *Cayuga* Native Elder, describes his recollections as a young man when this process was used to impart traditional knowledge. Elders would visit from many of the different communities and would tell stories for hours on end. In fact, these same Elders would sometimes visit each other for months at a time, telling stories and teaching the ceremonies and roles that people of all ages needed to know in order to keep their traditional culture alive and strong.

The second important element of traditional Native education that Miller (p. 17) describes is "the utilization of more formal and ritualized ceremonies to impart rite-of-passage lessons with due solemnity". It is argued in this paper that for effective lifelong learning to take place among indigenous peoples, the use of Elders and others as storytellers as well as more formal rite-of-passage learning experiences must be incorporated into the education process if it is to be truly life long and culturally meaningful for Canada's Native peoples. Perhaps the same may hold true, in appropriately differing forms, for other indigenous people in APEC member economies.

THE OBSTACLE OF ATTITUDE

A major obstacle in the development, or perhaps more appropriately described as the re-development, of lifelong learning is "attitude". Marie Battiste, a Canadian Native *Micmac* scholar, uses the term "cognitive imperialism" to describe the dilemmas faced by Native educators in Canada today.

[Cognitive imperialism is] ... the last stage of imperialism wherein the imperialist seeks to whitewash the tribal mind and soul and to create doubt.
(Battiste 1986:37)

In making this comment, Battiste was referring primarily to the effects of residential schools on Native people in Canada. These schools existed from the late nineteenth century until the early 1970s. They were called residential schools because the children were taken away from their parents and their communities, as much as 500 kilometres away, and made to live in residences attached to the schools. They were run by various Christian churches, and, for the most part, were dedicated towards separating Native children from their traditional culture, from their identity. By doing so, Native people came to doubt the viability of their cultural traditions in today's post industrial age. Through to this day these questions remain, as Natives query whether or not it is possible to be Native, and at the same time to be a successful member of the larger society.

In the educational context, these doubts continue to make Native people uncertain as to whether problems associated with managing their own schools are the result of colonial government interference or merely reflect the fact that their cultures, as they once knew them, were not "advanced" enough to acclimate to "modern" life. As a result, Native educators often lack the cultural confidence to be antecedently innovative, and instead are prone to locking themselves into Western academic frameworks while not looking for alternatives that are based on traditional ways of knowing. In terms of the central issue of this paper, the residential schools dealt a major blow to traditional learning in general and lifelong learning in particular among Native people by attempting to, and to a large extent succeeding in, separating learning from cultural identity. It is important to add that the residential schools did this with intent, the view being that by teaching Native children in a non-Native context, they would in fact become acculturated within, though not necessarily a part of, the larger society. In effect, they would become non-Natives.

TRADITIONAL CULTURE AND SCIENCE

"Modern" disciplines of study, such as science, can be taught through the medium of traditional culture. Pam Colorado, *Oneida* Native founder of the Indigenous Science Network, has developed a system for integrating traditional star knowledge and the use of contemporary star maps by describing where stars are situated within an appropriate cultural context. She teaches this at the Traditional Knowledge Program in the California Institute of Integral Studies. Combining the two cultural traditions helps establish and reinforce Native respect for the knowledge of their ancestors, and assists in the teaching of traditional stories while still providing instruction in a "modern" scientific discipline.

The following illustration describes merging of the traditional along with the modern discipline. In the Iroquois tradition, when the constellation *Ursa Major* reaches the most northerly point within the northern hemisphere during the month of October, it is known as the time of the "Bear and the Three Hunters". When this happens it is said that the three stars that make up the handle of Ursa Major are

hunters, and that they shoot the bear. This signal marks the point in the season when deciduous leaves begin to turn red from the blood of the bear and the men then know autumn has arrived and it is time for the hunting season to begin. By incorporating traditional stories within the broader discipline, and not just in Astronomy, but also within all other areas of study, Native students develop an appreciation for and understanding of phenomena within their own cultural context.

In another example, the Fetzner Institute (Kalamazoo, Michigan, U.S.A.) is using Native languages to help symbolise the principles of quantum physics, and in fact the Institute is bringing Western scientists and Native linguists together to help develop and understand different ways of investigating the relationships which exist between all natural things. Increasingly, Native stories, terms and descriptions are being used to express holistic relationships within science that can't be easily or completely communicated with European languages.

THE OBSTACLE OF CULTURE LOSS

The problem of the loss of traditional culture, created by residential schools and other mainstream assimilative forces, remains significant. Though Native educators often assume traditional values and cultural factors still exist in most Native communities and that these can be brought directly into the educational context, this is not always true. However, what does remain, to at least some degree, are rites-of-passage and other life stage activities which can be used to re-create the broad lifelong learning framework for Native people. As a result, the importance of these activities should not be underestimated.

The traditional rite-of-passage known as the Vision Quest (see Appendix A p. 226) is particularly useful for the institutionalization of a traditional lifelong learning framework. Its success as a cultural learning tool is related in part to its versatility and adaptability. Traditionally the Vision Quest was undertaken near the time a young Native man reached puberty. Those especially gifted in receiving visions also engaged in Vision Quests during later periods in life. Today, it is primarily adults that are involved in this rite-of-passage, the purpose no longer being one of linking with adulthood, but instead linking with traditional cultural identity. This transformation of the ritual is strong evidence of its importance and adaptability.

Another aspect of the flexibility of the Vision Quest is its cross-cultural dimension. Traditional lifelong learning within Native cultures sometimes involves being taught by those who, in a broader sense, are one's "own people"; in effect, one Native community is taught by another Native community. Through this type of relationship, Native people who have continued to enjoy an established and largely unbroken Vision Quest process assist those who lost certain elements and may be unable to replicate the entire ceremony. For example, the *Kenienke:haka* or *Mohawks*, a strong Native population living almost exclusively in the southern area of Canada, near urban centres such as Montreal, Quebec, and Brantford, Ontario, have in recent years been able to strengthen their connection with the Vision Quest in part through what they have learned from the more northern, less urban *Anishnabe* or *Ojibwa*, and more specifically from members of the *Midewewin*, an organization dedicated to preserving and promoting the traditions of the Ojibwa,

but also willing to help all Native peoples.

LANGUAGE AND LINGUISTIC ELDERS

The connection between the health of a minority language and the vitality of cultural identity is well established. The linguistic element of lifelong learning - some would describe it as the foundation - is challenged by Native attitudes and culture loss. Part of cognitive imperialism relates to the linguistic version of the "either/or" fallacy. This involves concluding that instruction in a Native language reduces one's ability to learn how to cope within the broader society. In other words, it is believed by some that you can't learn the Native language without giving up opportunities to learn, develop and be "successful" on the "outside". It becomes an either/or choice; you can't have both. Within Native communities, this view tends to be accepted by Native people who, through such influences as the residential schools, have lost or who never learned their own language. Not knowing the traditional language, and not benefitting from its cultural contribution in creating a strong sense of purpose and self-identity, makes it more difficult for the Natives who do not speak their own language to appreciate the value in teaching it to their children, even in Native-run schools.

Learning the language, particularly for Native people, is a critical component of the lifelong learning process. Even a modest level of instruction for Native adults in traditional language has been found to develop a strong and deep sense of cultural completeness.

Offering a variety of in-school language classes is one mode of delivery which will help ensure at least some success and consequent access to the broader opportunities associated with lifelong learning and cultural identity. However, this paper argues that more informal and less-structured ways of language learning should, or even must, be utilized. For example, Maria Campbell, a *Metis* writer of some renown and considerable ability, is a technically fluent *Cree* speaker who recently described a long and at first unsuccessful attempt to translate a traditional story. Initially her technique was based on a simple translation, word for word, phrase for phrase. In spite of the technical fit, she was dissatisfied with the English meanings. Finally, she invested much time listening to stories and having discussions with a Metis elder, and through this process came to understand the "deeper meanings". Learning language has to be much more than being able to translate words, particularly for Native groups. The purpose is to learn the culture, to be party to and fused with the lifelong learning cycle. This is most successful through non-formal association with Elders.

But how do you insure that there will always be knowledgeable Elders who can not only teach the language but who truly *know* the language? What's needed is to first overcome a second element of the either/or fallacy. This is the belief that everyone must be a speaker or else the language will die, a not uncommon view within Native communities. Discussions with various Native scholars have suggested that there are several possible solutions, one of which is for Native communities to determine which words everyone should know, and to ensure this learning is strongly supported. At the same time, the community would secure and protect the avail-

ability of a critical mass of speakers who are fully conversant in the language, the stories and the traditional culture. This is to some degree rather like the Hindu tradition of ensuring a supply of scholars who knew the holy language of Sanskrit. The Native community would be obliged to ensure that at least some of its members embarked on a lifelong learning mission of language and cultural study. Others could always learn from them, though to a more limited extent.

ELDERS AND RITES OF PASSAGE

Storytelling by Elders has always been a key element in traditional Native education, and it is critical that this be incorporated into any strategy for lifelong learning. However, this is easier said than done. Beatrice Medicine (1992), a *Lakota Sioux* educator, describes how people are often quick off the mark to say "consult the Elders", almost as if they are chanting a mantra. Often unasked is the question regarding how the consultation takes place.

> *People responsible for the hiring of older Indians as resource people make the mistake of merely putting them in a classroom with young children. The elders want to tell stories as they used to do but children are either too impatient to listen, or perhaps do not understand.*
>
> (Vivian Ayoungman as cited by Medicine, 1992, p. 150)

It is important to recognize the total context of the story-telling. Lifelong learning and the cultural framework as a whole are inseparable, and for aboriginal people may well be one and the same. Placing Elders in presentation-to-a-group settings, bound by highly-structured time constraints, seating arrangements and external notions of protocol and hierarchies, deviates completely from the cultural context. Traditionally children and adults alike learned from the Elders in one-on-one, repeated contacts in locations and at times that were mutually agreed upon. Further, what the Elders presented were not just isolated, amusing and interesting stories. They proffered the complete culture and people learned life through seamless, intertwined combinations of parables, allegories, lessons and even poetry, all of which were presented through entertaining and amusing conversations over a long period of time. For example, teaching traditional skills often involved telling stories to children that interwove the origin and history of the skill or the item involved with the more concrete "how to" required for basic skill competency. In today's context, Ojibwa adults being taught how to make a Little Boy Drum, also learn how healing came to their people and of the respect that must be given to the animals, plants, rocks and water that contribute to the making of the drum. Elder Jake Thomas, when he teaches Native people of all ages how to make beads, causes all of his students to become aware of the peace-making role of shell-bead wampum within the history of Cayuga culture. In order for the stories to be successful forms of modern yet traditional lifelong learning, they must serve the full cultural context.

More intense than the teaching of roles, history, skills and crafts is the range of activity associated with various rites-of-passage. Unlike other traditional learning exercises, this one is more strongly influenced by differences among various Native

groups as well as spirituality, including the infusion of western-based religious beliefs. Regardless, Miller (1996, p. 16) noted that despite the differences traditionally existing among different Native groups:

> *the various educational practices of the Aboriginal populations did share a common philosophical or spiritual orientation. For all these peoples, instruction was suffused with their deeply ingrained spirituality, an invariable tendency to relate the material and personal in their lives to the spirits and the unseen.*

But what resolve exists between traditional Native spirituality and Western-based Christian religions which have for some time in the past, and continue to, strongly influence many Native communities? For example, the *Micmac*, *Mohawk*, *Huron*, *Metis*, *Odawa* and *Algonquin* communities have integrated Catholicism as an integral part of what their Elders refer to as traditional life, and this sometimes causes confusion and conflict with regard to religious practices. The answers are not clear; however, what can be said is that there is a strong tradition of Native spiritual leaders who have during the course of their lives been "in both camps", one example being the famous Lakota holy man, Black Elk, who was once a Catholic lay preacher. This suggests that opportunities for a merging of different perspectives do exist.

Regardless, in some Native communities there is considerable conflict between Christian Natives and traditionalists who want to return to the spirituality framework which existed prior to contact with Europeans and Christians, as well as conflict between Christian sects, though this seems to lessen somewhat when the religious leaders are Native rather than non-Native. This is not a simple problem to resolve, but lessons learned from language assimilation or through incorporating science with traditional beliefs may be of some help. This paper argues that by having the entire community take part in broader spiritual, lifelong learning traditions, including rites-of-passage, the issues associated with incorporating or excluding Western spiritual beliefs will resolve themselves as Native people become stronger within their own learning traditions and therefore more able to appropriately affiliate with other views. Elders can and must perform a key role in this process.

At the heart of much of this are the traditional Native rites-of-passage, and more specifically the Vision Quest. Its utility is not just spiritual in nature, but rather it, perhaps more than other elements in the lifelong learning process, can be used as an effective bridge between cultures. The Vision Quest as an alternative form of justice provides a case in point. Just a few years ago, a young *Bella Coola* Native man was increasingly involved with crimes that demonstrated increasing levels of violence. His uncle requested the court to enforce a traditional Native remedy. The judge agreed, and the young man was left on an isolated, west coast island alone, with some food and other supplies. During the course of his several months' stay, he saw visions of the "ugly spirit" he had become, and came to learn how he should change his life. At the end of his stay the man was welcomed back by the Elders, and the entire community acknowledged his "graduation" and re-entry in the community through a "washing" ceremony. (Interestingly, the story was documented in modern fashion through videotape and the ecumenical nature of the washing cere-

mony symbolized by the song "Amazing Grace" which was selected as background music.)

In a related fashion, Elders visiting Native inmates in prisons have begun holding traditional ceremonies such as the Sweat Lodge and smudging, which is ritual "bathing" in the sacred smoke of sweetgrass, sage or cedar. For Native prisoners who have never had a productive relationship with their culture, this has proven to be a first step towards cultural embracement and traditional lifelong learning. It has also had a demonstrable effect on what the dominant culture refers to as rehabilitation.

IMPLICATIONS FOR LIFELONG LEARNING IN APEC COUNTRIES

What are the implications for lifelong learning with respect to indigenous peoples living in APEC countries? First, this paper documents the need for traditional learning practices of indigenous peoples to be accepted and supported, most importantly because they have validity in the modern context for both the indigenous groups and the larger, dominant cultures. Indigenous people will have difficulties being successful in the larger cultural context without strong links to and a recognition and acceptance of their underlying culture. This requires flexibility on the part of mainstream educational institutions, and an openness to the idea that "modern" takes many forms. It also requires that the indigenous peoples themselves understand and accept learning as a lifelong process for the entire community, an ideology once inherent in the traditional culture and only recently abandoned. For some, doubts will continue with regard to the viability of learning and living within the traditional cultural context while at the same time achieving success and flourishing within the dominant group. For these people, there is a need to appreciate the fact that learning which strengthens identity does not take away from the effective development of skills and knowledge, that learning is much broader than skill acquisition or cultural adaptation, and that traditional learning for indigenous people has always been and should in the future be lifelong. Required is a strategy whereby the community experiences lifelong learning together. The most consequential element of this is learning language. This does not necessarily mean that all members of the community will be fluent speakers, but rather that there will be fluent speakers within all age cohorts. Support for this from the dominant culture is critical, and learning from successful Native language programs within the APEC membership would bring powerful benefits throughout the region.

Elders and the learning they facilitate must be respected, and part of that respect entails having the Elders presenting within their traditional cultural context. Further, it is important that the cultural identity component of learning be linked with applications appropriate for life in today's society. This could include the more prosaic examples of being able to create something, as well as the more radical illustrations associated with being better prepared for various rites-of-passage. This, of course, is only radical in the sense of the culture being preserved, not in the way it is preserved. Muslims before and during their pilgrimage to Mecca, Catholics preparing for confirmation, and Jews getting ready for bar and bat mitzvahs undergo preparatory learning processes without this being thought of as taking some-

thing away from their ability to cope within modern society.

In part, the solution may relate to the packaging, or some might say unpackaging, of learning. Formal education tends to focus on stages, a rigid curricula, and grading at predetermined ages. Programs are typically centred around some form of paper promotion (diplomas, degrees, and grades), and teachers are available within established times at centralized institutions. But the lifelong learning that indigenous people must go through to keep their cultural identity strong, an indispensable part of any lifelong learning plan, requires that language learning, elders and their stories, and rites-of-passage be available at times, ages, places and sequences that reflect the needs and life schedules of individuals, not the semester-based plans of institutions. Effective lifelong learning for indigenous peoples must be developed within the traditional cultural context, not apart from it.

Canada's Native people historically had a well-established system of lifelong learning in which there was no separation between "vocational" and "cultural". Instead, all learning was intertwined, braided like a good rope. It was contact with Western culture, particularly in the form of residential schools, that unravelled the rope, making it ineffective. Natives are now reforming the rope, making it strong again by reconnecting cultural identity and lifelong learning. Perhaps in this way Canadian Natives are providing a lesson, not just for themselves, but for indigenous peoples as well as members of dominant cultures throughout the APEC region.

Member economies will be well served to recall that APEC Leaders and Ministers have emphasized the centrality of people to the APEC vision and the APEC agenda, and in particular the promotion of the well-being of *all people* within the region. The well-being of indigenous people can only be delivered in concert with strategies and programs that support the enhancement of cultural well-being, which in turn will almost certainly be an outgrowth of strong, effective and culturally embedded lifelong learning practices and programs.

Appendix A

- The Ojibwa Vision Quest -

There is a great deal of mystery surrounding the Vision Quest. Even Natives suffer from misapprehensions, in part a legacy of residential school ignorance and ethnocentric suspicions. This appendix describes simply and succinctly a traditional *Ojibwa* Vision Quest, starting with a description of the Sweat Lodge.

The Sweat Lodge itself is constructed of 16 overlapping willow poles. It is shaped to resemble the sky world above that covers the earth like a dome. The entrance must face the east as this is where all birth takes place, starting with sunrise. During the course of the day, the sun moves into the western sky, sinking below the horizon only to be reborn again the next day. All life works in this cyclical manner.

A pit is dug inside the centre of the lodge where the grandfathers are received and where they meet mother earth. The grandfathers are stones, the oldest elements in creation. As such, they hold the mysteries of all the ages. Before the grandfathers are brought into the lodge, they are first placed at the bottom of a sacred fire in front of the lodge. Here they are heated until they become white hot. How long the Vision Quest seeker plans to sweat will determine how many stones will be called upon to guide him in the Sweat Lodge. Between the Sweat Lodge and the sacred fire is a pathway of cedar. Once this path is made it may never be crossed.

When the Sweat Lodge and sacred fire are prepared, the Elder calls the participants to the fire. They then throw sacred tobacco into the fire and pray. This is how the people give thanks to the creator. The Elder then tells how the Sweat Lodge came to be, a story which describes how a little boy was sent to the seven grandfather spirits in the star world during a time of great sickness and was given the gift of the Sweat Lodge to bring back to his people for healing. A water drum is placed inside the Sweat Lodge close to the entrance. This drum is called the Little Boy Drum in remembrance of the little boy who brought back the teachings. The participants greet the drum as they enter. It has seven stones that surround the top, representing the seven grandfathers who first gave the little boy the teaching. When the Sweat Lodge is occupied, the Elder sings the ceremonial songs that have been handed down from generation to generation.

The grandfathers are then brought in to the lodge and placed in the pit. The Elder throws water onto the grandfathers, and the steam makes the lodge quite hot. After the initial sweat is completed, each participant goes to a small lodge and begins to meditate. Cedar leaves are placed around these lodges in order to provide protection from any evil spirits that may try to enter during fasting. From this stage on, the participants are alone with their thoughts. Each day, however, the Elder queries each participant about his spiritual experience. That is the only time the participants speak.

The nights are said to have their own special nature. The first is described as the night of doubt, where participants pray but are uncertain about what will happen. Hunger is mitigated by a feeling of excitement. The second night is one of fear, sometimes known as the dark night of the soul. Participants realize that their bod-

ies are beginning to weaken, and they may question their resolve. The third night is the night of the spirit. It is often said that if something meaningful is going to happen, it will occur between the beginning of the spirit night until the fast is finished.

On the fourth day, the sacred fire is lit once again and participants drink cedar tea before entering the Sweat Lodge. After the fast, breaking another sweat is not easy. Participants often feel faint, and those that have had visions during the four days are given tobacco to offer to the grandfather spirits, thanking them for what they have been taught or shown. This might include thanks for being given a name, or discovering one's totem animal.

When the final sweat has been completed the participants leave the lodge. At this stage they are given cedar leaves to put into their shoes in order to have the strength to walk away from the lodge. The final stage of the Vision Quest is the feast. This includes eating and giving gifts to the Elder as well as to others who have assisted the participants in preparing for the quest. This reflects the value of generosity, highly respected by the Ojibwa.

This rite of passage is one of the most important events in Native life. The loss of it is one of the reasons why Native youth and adults have so many difficulties adjusting to the outside society. The Vision Quest is where Natives begin to find themselves in the journey of lifelong learning.

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